

Infantry OSUT Company Command

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Many captains are disappointed, or worse, when they are assigned to command infantry one-station unit training (OSUT) companies. Many others in the Army also tend to think of training unit commands as inferior.

During my own first 17 years in the Army, I viewed the training battalion environment as one in which drill sergeants dutifully executed a program of instruction that was spelled out day by day, while officer caretakers handled VIP briefings. During those years as a mechanized infantry platoon leader, a battalion and brigade staff officer, and a light infantry company commander, I never gave much thought to what the initial-entry soldiers coming into our units did or knew.

Now, after 15 months of commanding an OSUT battalion, I realize the importance of that training and the challenge of the company commander's job. The turbulent world and the shrinking Army we face no longer guarantee us the time to re-train soldiers in their units before their deployment into harm's way. The commander of a training company, just like his counterparts in units organized under tables of organization and equipment (TOEs), exercises leadership in its purest form, managing training six days a week (in accordance with Field Manual 25-101), executing a training cycle in which there is one shot at each event, developing subordinates, and maintaining equipment. He is responsible for taking 220 civilians every 13 weeks and turning them into infantrymen who are physically fit, motivated, self-disciplined, and trained to standard.

The program of instruction contains many daily events that, in the hands of

an inept commander, could amount to four hours of standing in line, 15 minutes of firing a weapon, and four hours of cleaning the weapon. But a good commander tackles each day five weeks in advance and builds interrelated training events on the basis of assessed weaknesses in the soldiers and the unit throughout the training cycle.

Several years ago, when we debated whether it was fair to send light infantry lieutenants to command heavy companies, or vice versa, we found that good leaders do well regardless of their assignments. Our excellent manuals provide the foundation, while common sense, analytical ability, caring, and leadership skills build on that foundation to achieve success. The guidance that centralized selection boards receive reflects this understanding.

There are no blueprints. The company commander who expects to find them is left in the dust of his peers who are hard at work providing the best infantrymen in the world for our Army. If a commander fails his TOE company, it affects only the battalion and the brigade; the division may feel a ripple. But if a commander fails his OSUT soldiers, it affects squads, platoons, and companies throughout the Army.

This is not to say that one job is harder than the other. Each has challenges the other does not have. But don't sell the training company commander short. The successful ones are good leaders, trainers, and maintainers with a good bit of common sense, coupled with a constant vision of excellence, just like their counterparts in TOE units. The leadership challenge is in properly controlling almost absolute power over soldiers and

motivating them toward excellence. Certainly, a go-to-war TOE force is the heart of the army, but its lifeblood originates in the training base.

Serving as the infantry representative on a recent board to select officers for promotion to major, I learned that there really is no difference between OSUT company command and TOE company command in an officer's selection for promotion. A training company commander whose file was below center of mass was not selected for promotion; a TOE commander whose file was below center of mass was not selected for promotion. In either category, a commander whose file was above center of mass was selected. It was still performance—and the potential revealed in that performance—that determined selection.

The only perceivable effect of the training company command may be a lack of experience in collective training. An officer can overcome some of this deficiency, however, by staying current on branch manuals and incorporating collective officer pro-fessional development and leader development throughout the training cycle. This means only that a good OSUT commander must work a little harder to prepare himself for his next job in a TOE unit.

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